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ABSTRACT

This paper presents ten principles of learning in the curriculum that help community college instructors refine their teaching techniques. The principles focus on increasing student comprehension and direct instructors to: (1) foster student interest in curriculum activities; (2) attach meaning to what they teach; (3) emphasize purpose or reason for learning; (4) offer a quality sequence of related learning opportunities; (5) develop problem-solving skills in students; (6) teach critical thinking; (7) stress creative thinking in ongoing lessons and units of study; (8) promote positive attitudes in students toward learning; (9) be available for conferences and office hours; and (10) encourage student evaluation of courses and teaching. Another suggestion for improving instructor technique is the implementation of a quality in-service education program that contains the following elements: (1) a professional library for community college instructors, where they may research ways of improving method; (2) faculty meetings, at which sessions in improving curriculum and teaching are offered; and (3) locally developed workshops on bettering instruction. The paper concludes with the assertion that community college teachers need to make use of these principles of learning and make their primary goal to guide students in achieving optimum learning. (AS)

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Improving Community College Teaching

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IMPROVING COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHING

There are dynamic principles of learning from a study of educational psychology which may provide excellent guidance to community college instructors in teaching students. These principles of learning provide guidelines for community college instructors to use in improving the curriculum. Students need to achieve as optimally as possible in each class/course taken. Which principles of learning should instructors then emphasize in teaching and learning situations?

Principals of Learning in the Curriculum

There are ten principles of learning that community college instructors need to stress in ongoing lessons and units of study. First, community college students should experience interest in each activity pursued in the curriculum. Whatever is taught should emphasize capturing and maintaining student interest. Attentive learners learn more and retain learnings longer when experiencing the interest factor in class/course work. Thus the student and the subject matter being studied become one, not separate entities. There is active engagement by the student in achieving, learning, and developing. A community college instructor who works in the direction of developing learner interest in the curriculum will assist students to learn more and retain content for a longer period of time (Ediger, College Student Journal, 1994).

Second, community college instructors need to have students attach meaning in what is being learned. With meaningful learning, the student will understand subject matter and skills more proficiently. If meaning is lacking, students may well memorize subject matter or skills for a test. Memorizing content/skills has little value for students. To be meaningful, what students have learned can be written or said in their

very own words. Learners may also be able to explain content and skills learned orally to others whereby comprehension is involved.

Third, community college instructors need to stress purpose in student learning. When purpose is involved, students perceive reasons for learning. Accepted reasons for leaning assist students to feel increased levels of motivation. The instructor needs to emphasize purpose throughout the time the class is taught. Thus involved purposes should be stated by the instructor at the beginning, middle, and toward the end of the course. At additional intervals, as needed, the instructor needs to emphasize why it is important for students to study hard on the concepts and generalizations being emphasized in class and in the course syllabus. To learn means to put forth effort and achieve.

Fourth, community college instructors need to stress quality sequence in ongoing learning opportunities. With good sequence, what has been presented previously provides readiness for learning the new content and skills. When poor sequence is involved, students do not perceive the relationships between the old and the new in terms of presentations made by the instructor. When relationships are not perceived, students tend to learn isolated facts, rather than integration of content and skills. Instructors need to watch that students experience sequential learning and experience continuous progress.

Fifth, community college instructors need to develop problem solving skills within students. With problem solving, students are able to identify problem areas that truly stress the unknown. Once the problem has been chosen, the instructor guides students to gather information from a variety of reference sources. An answer or tentative hypothesis is developed. The tentative answer or hypothesis is tested with additional study. If it withstands the additional reading and study, the hypothesis remains as stated. Otherwise, it is revised.

Problem solving is important in class as well as in society. Individuals are faced with problems that need solutions. There are major problems which take up much time in solving. Minor problems may need to be solved immediately or within a reasonably short period of time.

Community college instructors need to provide time for problem solving experiences in classes taught.

With modern technology, community college instructors may stress use of a variety of materials of instruction. Print and nonprint learning activities as materials of instruction have been expanded to include internet, World Wide Web, E mail, software packages, CD ROMs, and Fax, among others. Instructors need to make full use of technology to assist students to learn as much as possible and also increase problem solving skills.

Sixth, community college instructors need to emphasize critical thinking in classes taught. Critical thought involves higher levels of cognition in that the student needs to learn to separate facts from opinions, fantasy from reality, accurate from inaccurate ideas, relevant from the irrelevant, among other items of comparisons and contrasts made. The student is bombarded with information and needs to be able to analyze content provided. Too frequently, students are prone to accept what is said or written as fact. Rather the student should separate content presented into component parts such as facts from opinions, among other divisions. Better thinkers should be an end result when students learn to be critical in their thinking (Ediger, 1997).

Seventh, community college instructors need to stress creative thinking in ongoing lessons and units of study. With creative thought, students are challenged to come up with novel, unique ideas in classroom discussions. Creative students perceive gaps in knowledge and attempt to fill the voids with original ideas. Brainstorming is an approach used by instructors to encourage students to be creative. With brainstorming, there are no limits to the number of ideas generated pertaining to the meaning of a term, phrase, quote, or the number of uses of an object (Ediger, 1994, Education).

Eighth, community college instructors need to develop quality attitudes within students for learning. How is this to be done? Learners need to experience success in the curriculum. A successful person in the community college will tend to possess a quality attitude. Honest

praise given to a student for doing well in class is time well spent. The instructor might then say, "That's good," for a quality answer given in class. Students also need to be satisfied with the quality of instruction offered. An unprepared instructor, teaching poorly, will not assist students to develop good attitudes toward learning. Course work needs to be relevant and purposeful for students to achieve positive feelings in class (Ediger, College Student Journal, 1995) .

Ninth, instructors need to be available in their offices for student conferences. Students may need information pertaining to class assignments as well as ideas presented in class. The community college instructor then needs to set time aside to be in his/her office to provide needed assistance to learners.

Tenth, community college instructors need to be evaluated by students. The evaluation should be done somewhat toward the beginning of the course so that the instructor may use the results to improve the curriculum for the remainder of the semester or quarter. The evaluation device may be commercially produced or developed locally. The important point is that the evaluation device is valid/reliable and measures the quality of instruction offered by the community college instructor. The instructor needs to use the feedback to assess his/her own progress in doing a good job of teaching. Videotaping teaching in the classroom and analyzing the results should also aid in improving the quality of the community college instructor's teaching. Colleagues may be invited to appraise the videotape results and offer suggestions for improving instruction (Ediger, 1995).

Inservice Education and The Community College Instructor

A quality inservice edcation program may go a long way in having community college instructors emphasize relevant principles of learning from the educational psychology arena. A professional library should be available for community college instructors whereby they may study ways of assisting students to achieve more optimally. The library should

have recent textbooks and periodicals on how to improve instruction.

Second, instructors need to attend professional meetings in which the sessions therein have been designed in improving the community college curriculum. The costs for attending these meeting should be accepted and borne by the community college. In attending these meetings, community college instructors need to attend meetings which will assist in doing a better job of teaching students. It might be a good ideas for those attending these meetings to give a report orally to faculty members or list in writing in a newsletter or E-mail salient content from attending the meeting. As many instructors as possible should benefit from each other's ideas obtained from the presentation.

Third, community college instructors need to plan and attend locally developed workshops to improve instruction. The goals need to be planned cooperatively by participants. Instructional needs should be thoroughly addressed. A need in teaching might be how to develop within all students purpose for engaged learning. Adequate reference materials should be available at the workshop to help solve these kinds and other types of instructional problems.

Conclusion

Community college instructors need to make use of principles of learning from the psychology of education in teaching and learning situations. Guiding community college students to achieve as optimally as possible is the major goal of instruction. Instructors then need to choose each objective carefully that students are to achieve. These objectives need to have relevance and worth. Learning opportunities selected for students to achieve the objectives should encourage effort, value, and relevance. Evaluation procedures to determine student learning need to be valid and reliable. A variety of procedures need to be used in evaluating student progress in the community college curriculum. Ediger (College Student Journal, 1997) wrote the following pertaining to teaching in the community college:

Community college students must experience a curriculum that is

perceived as being relevant. With the knowledge and skills explosion in society, students need to feel the objectives being stressed...have worth presently as well as in the future. Instructors should select each objective carefully in the curriculum. Students must receive the best education possible in a changing society which demands workers having quality knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

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